

A Hornbook
For Witches
Leah Bodine Drake

A HORNBOOK FOR WITCHES

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

Few poets are as felicitous in their chosen medium as Leah Bodine Drake is in the genre of macabre poetry. Here are close to half a hundred of the best contemporary poems in the field of the fantastic—poems of ghosts and goblins, of whimsy and of terror, of witches and warlocks, of legends and curses, of visions and dreams.

From the title poem, which opens the collection, to the final *The Centaurs*, the vein of the macabre never falters. Miss Drake writes with a sure hand and with an admirable restraint of subjects which are not dared by poets far better-known, and, whether she is concerned with the pathetic but credible creature of *Mad Woman's Song* or the fractious *Wood-Wife*, with the malefic beings of *Unhappy Ending* or what was *Heard on the Roof at Midnight* she is equally effective in arousing doubts as to the proximity of ghoulies and beasties and things that go bump in the night.

Here are such remarkably effective poems as *The Path Through the Marsh*, the prize-winning *Ballad of the Jabberwock*, *All-Saints' Eve*, *The Window on the Stair*, *Goat-Song*, and many another outstanding example of the macabre in a medium all too seldom exploited by writers in the field.

These poems will satisfy that all too human curiosity about the other side of darkness at the same time that they will afford a kind of entertainment which is becoming increasingly rare in our time.

o o o

The jacket is the work of Frank Utpatel.

To Frank Uttpal,
in deep appreciation —
Leah Bodine Drake.

1950.

Frank Uttpal

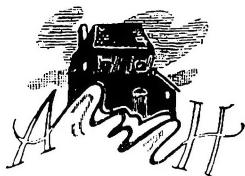
A HORNBOOK FOR WITCHES

A Hornbook for
W I T C H E S

POEMS OF FANTASY

By

LEAH BODINE DRAKE



ARKHAM HOUSE

SAUK CITY, WISCONSIN

1950

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TO MY SIXTEENTH CENTURY ANCESTOR
JEAN BODIN
WHO ALSO CONCERNED HIMSELF
WITH WITCHES

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A HORNBOOK FOR WITCHES

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I. THE BESOM

*When full gallop they would speed
To a coven far away,
Thrifty witches use a steed
Economical—the broom.
This asks neither stall nor groom,
Never runs a bill for hay.*

II. THE FAMILIAR

*Mangy, lean, of evil fame,
Subject to her own dark laws,
Old Grimalkin tells her dame
Ancient lore that all cats know,
And their secret: how to show
Friendship while you flex your claws!*

III. THE MAGIC CIRCLE

*Here within this potent round,
Witch secure from harm may stay.
Safety lies in circles: bound
In such mystic cypher goes
Earth and all the worlds. Who knows
What grim Shapes it keeps at bay?*

IV. ENCHANTED SLEEP

*Vivien, the limmer lass,
Stepping from the faëry lake,
Bound Merlin in tree of glass
With her cup of magic dwale.
Now she lies (so ends each tale)
In sleep of death no spell can break.*

V. MAGICIAN'S HAT

*Like a steeple to the skies
Soared the occult headdress, once
Worn with pride by adept wise.
Round the brim the Zodiac
Whirled in scarlet thread. Alack,
Now this cap denotes the dunce!*

VI. WITCH'S WHEEL

*By the turning of this wheel,
Faithfulness in hearts of men
Young enchantresses can seal.
Circe long ago did hold
Such a toy. (Yet we are told
Ulysses never came again.)*

VII. THE SPELLS

*There are words of awful might
That each witch-wife must be learning.
If the runes are spoken right
Fiends will hasten to obey.
Let the tongue slip—neighbors may
Suddenly smell something burning!*

VIII. THE COVEN

*Cross-legged on the Sarsen Stone
Satan sits, with stag-horn crown.
Witches kneeling by his throne
Wonder at his mask in fear:
Is it Sin in person here?
(Likely just a clerk from town!)*

IX. THE COVENANT

*Writ on scroll of felon's skin
With her blood, for evil's sake,
Is her name. Now she is kin
To Pamphila, Endor, Bork!
Lucifer will bless her work
And reward her—with the stake.*

UNHAPPY ENDING

*The wood was lonely and grey,
The wood was misty and cold,
The wood was unspeakably old.*

*The four who journeyed that way
Were lost, for their lantern had died
And the map they'd consulted had lied,*

*For the path did not turn where it should.
Dead leaves lay deep on the ground
And brambles grew thick all around.*

*Now the four were alone in the wood,
And a fear of which none of them spoke
Had settled on each like a cloak,*

*For night had darkened the sky
And the wood was so silent and cold,
The wood was so terribly old. . . .*

*Then did the travelers spy
A little, squat round-tower loom
Ahead in the lowering gloom.*

*A tower set deep in the wood
With a light from a high, broken slit
Like the stare of an old one-eyed cat.*

*Then the four had visions of food,
Warm fires, and beds in a house;
And they halloo'd the dwellers to rouse!*

*And They who lived in that tower
Listened . . . and each crouching thing eyed
His brother and nudged furry side.*

*Like coals did their lidless eyes glower,
As with mouths that driveled and slobbered
They quietly mewed and gobbled.*

*Then one padded slyly down stair
And drew back the double-barred lock
And waited. . . . All was still. Then a knock*

*Thundered. "Is there anyone there?
We are four honest, lost journeymen,"
Cried the first of the wayfarers. Then*

*He opened that dubious door
And the four followed hopefully after—
Those plump, tender journeymen four!*

In the tower was horrible laughter.

WITCHES ON THE HEATH

*Three witches danced on the heath last night,
Dancing widdershins round a tree.
Wildly widdershins whirled the three
Under a wild and cloud-swept sky,
While a goblin moon rode high
Over the hill where the Old Stones lie;
And their hats were peaked,
And they twittered and squeaked
As they danced in the green moonlight.*

*And out of the boughs of the twisted thorn
Came the wail of a violin,
Queer and evil and sad and thin.
And though there was nobody one could see,
Somebody played in the twisted tree
Queer, sad tunes for the witches three,
Till a lost wind crept
From the hills and wept,
And the farm-cocks crowed up the morn.*

THE TENANTS

*Among the black trees spider-webbed
Against a red and wintry dusk
I leaned upon the sagging gate,
And looked up at the evil husk*

*Of that old house, remote from town
And haunted, so the farm-folk said,
By brother ghosts—the victim stabbed,
The killer hanged till he was dead.*

*“How does it feel” I asked the pair
Of farmers lounging in the door,
“To live within a haunted house?
You must have nerves of steel and more!”*

*A hoot-owl cried within the wood;
The sky above was red as sin;
The shadows deepened. . . . Side by side
Each figure eyed me with a grin.*

*Then one replied “We have to stay—
This is our home, the land we tilled . . .
For I’m the one they hanged,” he said,
“And he’s the one I killed.”*

THE BALLAD OF THE JABBERWOCK

(A True Tale of Squankom Town*)

*My grandmother tells me,
When the lights are low,
How the Jabberwock appeared
In Squankom long ago.*

*First a frightened farmer,
Tearing into town,
Told how his wife had seen
Something big and brown,*

*Horned like a billy-goat
And scaled like a dragon,
Perched cross-legged on
Their brand-new wagon.*

*It leaped into the barn
And hid in the hay.
She screeched blue murder
And fainted away!*

*The Timmermans saw It,
Coming from Cross Keys;
It crept from Corkray's Wood
And peered 'round the trees.*

* Squankom, the original Indian name of a certain little town in South Jersey, and which means "the place of the evil god," is one of the places where the mysterious creature variously called the "Jersey Devil" or "Jabberwock" was seen around the turn of the century.

*Footprints were found in fields
Clawed like a bird's;
It clumped over Kārsh's roof
Gibbering words.*

*Then folks began to see It
Here and everywhere,
Clinging to the steeple,
Winging through the air*

*With vans of a mighty bat;
Or walking in a pasture
Upright as any man
And cocky as a master!*

*Squankom locked all its doors,
And bright lamps were lit
In chilly front parlors
Where folks seldom sit*

*Except for a funeral
Or the minister's call.
But what lurks in darkness?
They lighted up all.*

*Some few were skeptical
And would only smile;
But the path to the barn at night
Seemed like a mile!*

*Reverend Walsey preached of sin,
And most folks agreed
That It was a warning
They had better heed.*

*They named It The Jabberwock
For want of another;
But some shook their heads: "It's
The Devil's own brother!"*

*Then people came to church
Who'd never been yet.
Some patched up a quarrel
And some paid a debt.*

*Cousin Flo and Cousin Kate
Forgot they didn't speak;
And Old Man Jones stayed sober
For one amazing week.*

*Wives left off nagging
And husbands kissed their wives.
The Claybrook brothers went to work
For once in their lives.*

*No one watered any milk
Or cut the measures down;
And Tillie got religion
And all her girls left town!*

*Then one day the town awoke
To find It had fled:
No one saw It squatting
On his barn or shed.*

*No one saw those footprints
Huge upon his lawn. . . .
Suddenly, as It had come,
The Jabberwock had gone.*

*The church held a meeting,
And great thanks were given
That Satan had done his worst
And left them scared but shriven.*

*Satan had ramped about
Like a roaring lion;
But Squankom held firm, and now
Was a little Zion.*

*They were the wonder-town
Of the countryside!
They had driven Evil out!
They let Good abide*

*For almost a fortnight. . . .
Then someone stole a sack
Of flour out of Barker's store,
And Tillie's girls came back.*

BAD COMPANY

*The owl, the bat and the twisted tree. . . .
I wonder why they are dear to me?
 The owl is eerie, the owl is evil,
 And everyone know's that the bat's of the Devil!
And a tree that's gnarled and leans awry,
And bears wild fruit that is puckered and dry
Is surely one that the most pass by,
 Afraid of its goblinry.*

*There's something wrong with a human wight
Who likes to be out in the windy night. . . .
 I love the night and the wild wind over;
 The wind to me is a sky-born lover!
But the night is black and so is sin;
Then witches ride while the good stay in;
And the owl and the bat are the witches' kin—
 So look at my fearful plight:*

*I love the things that the most pass by,
The tree on the heath that leans awry,
 The wild black night and the lanterned owl,
 The bat that goes in a velvet cowl. . . .
O there's no doubt, a witch I must be
Who love with unholy ecstasy
The owl and the bat and the twisted tree
 And wind in a midnight sky!*

MOUSE HEAVEN

*Heaven is a great House
Paneled thick in oak;
Terrier nor cat will rouse
Fear in little folk.*

*Heaven is the quiet
And the deep, deep dark;
Never comes nigh it
Lamp nor candle's spark,*

*Only the glancing
Of Mother Moon bright
On floors bare for dancing
Of feet wee and light.*

*There are the cheeses
Yellow as moons,
And rare bacon greases
And sausage-festoons*

*On low shelves flaunted
In reach of tiny paws,
In pantries unhaunted
By traps or claws.*

*There little hearts may beat
Calmly in bed,
Shaken by no giant's feet
Thundering overhead.*

*None need to flee the feasts
Nor die in the snares—
All of us helpless beasts
Will live without cares.*

*For up where the shadows drowse
In His holy hall
Abides the Very-Mouse
Watching over all.*

*Obey the ancient law,
(Hear ye, O Folk!)
Which is to run and gnaw
And housewife-provoke,*

*And death will not deny
The long-promised House,
The good Mansion-in-the-Sky
Of the Tribe of Mouse!*

RABBIT-DANCE

*Out in the woods where the snow lies white
A rabbit is dancing, dancing tonight.*

*The world is hushed and the wind is still;
The woodchucks sleep within the hill.
Muffled in snow, tall cedars loom
Like white-cloaked wizards in the gloom;
And with delicate capers and curious prances
On the frozen snow a rabbit dances.*

*The moon comes up with a questioning face
And leans and looks in that woodland place
At the snow-white rabbit who stamps and leaps
On his dancing-ground, while the white world sleeps.
She leans and looks with a wondering eye,
Then trundles higher into the sky.*

*But with hind-legs beating the glistening snow
And with fore-paws wavering to and fro,
All by his lone to a secret song
The rabbit dances the whole night long.*

WOOD-WIFE

*In a hollow oak-tree
I live by the wood,
A bit more than human
And much less than good.*

*I've queer spells, potent spells,
That I went to learn
To the goat-hooved and shaggy ones
Who hide in the fern.*

*Down the brambly hedge-rows
You may see me pass,
Gathering berries for a wine
Not for mortal's glass.*

*The good-wives, the house-wives,
They shudder at my sin:
But much they'd give to learn to weave
Cloth of spiders'-spin!*

*My pet fox, my russet fox,
He ravishes their geese,
Yet none dare call out the hounds
If they would know peace!*

*On a day of falling leaves
I met the young Squire.
I gave him a sidelong look
That set his face afire.*

*The bonny young Squire,
He dreams in a spell;
Not of golden curlylocks
Of Parson Jones' Nell—
But of red hair, and green eyes
That have looked on Hell!*

*Dream, pretty Squire-kin!
It's small use to burn!
For when the moon is up
The wood-wife will turn*

*Three times widdershins,
And greet where you stood
The shagged-men, the satyr-men
Who creep from the wood!*

A LIKELY STORY!

*Up the dragon's rocky glen
The young knight crept.
The dragon, lonely in his den,
Unheedful slept.*

*The young knight felt no numbing fright,
But pride and awe:
No living eyes had seen such might
As his now saw!*

*This was the Ancient of the land,
The primal wonder
Told of in legend, grimly grand
With wings of thunder*

*And coil on coil of body scaled
And pavonine,
Crusted with gold and lapis, mailed
In tourmaline.*

*Was this the maiden-thief, the bane
Of kings and courts?
This old aristocrat would scorn
Such childish sports!*

*The young knight felt a sudden ruth:
How did he know
Those fearsome rumors were the truth
And this a foe?*

*Why should he bring this gorgeous worm
To death and dolour
To gratify a princess's whim
And prove his valour?*

*A wild thought hurtled through his brain
Like blazing light:
Perhaps in dragons as in men
God took delight.*

*The hero sheathed his sword once more . . .
"The Devil take
The princess, then!" he softly swore;
And through the murk*

*Went down to jibe and ridicule,
Dishonour-clad,
Feeling a little like a fool
But fiercely glad.*

ALL-SAINTS' EVE

Look! . . .

*There—beyond the window-pane,
Through the withered and rattling vine!
A wee face, spangled with silver rain,
Lovely and wan, stares in at mine!*

*White as a shell upon the sands
Where the black billows break and pass,
Something is pressing tiny hands
Against the barrier of the glass.*

*Something eerie and fay and pale
Is peering in from the haunted night,
At our small room snug from the angry gale
Where faces glow in the firelight.*

*Slant, strange eyes under sea-green hair
Look wistfully in through the window-pane. . . .*
Quick! . . .

Open the casement! . . . What is there
That cries in the wind and the streaming rain?

*It has gone, it has gone—there is nothing there
Blown by the storm to our window-pane. . . .
Only the night and the chill sea-air
And the voice of the sorrowful rain.*

THE LAST FAUN

*I saw him! I saw him!—but yesterday
Curled up on my misty lawn!
The small snub nose and the amber horns—
I saw him, the last faun!*

*The last of the prick-eared, joyous folk
That startled the brake and wood
In the timeless days when the Earth was young
And the dreams of men were good.*

*They have all passed down to the Hollow Land
That lies back of the rising moon—
The leaf-brown nymphs and the centaurs wise,
And Pan and the Panic tune.*

*And here was the world's last, lonely myth
Asleep in the early dew
Beneath my window! . . . Then shrill and clear,
The cock his bugle blew.*

*The Wild Thing leapt! With a flash of fur
And a clatter of hooves he fled,
And nothing to show where he had been
But the crushed grass of his bed.*

*He had gone! He had gone! The final faun,
Searching the lands we know
For that ancient path to the secret land
Where his kind passed long ago.*

CHANGELING

*I am out on the wind
In the wild black night;
On the wings of the owl
I take my flight,
On the ghostly wings of the great white owl;
And whether the night be fair or foul,
Or the moon be up or the thunder growl,
Happy I be,
Happy I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me!*

*When meek folk sleep
In their dull soft beds,
I creep over roots
That the weasel treads,
Where the squat red lamps of the toadstools glow—
And only the fox knows the ways I go,
And nobody knows the things I know. . . .
Wise I be,
Wise I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me!*

*O Mother, slumber
And do not wake! . . .
Thin voices called
From the rain-wet brake,
And the child you cradled against your breast
Is out in the night on the black wind's crest,
For only the wild can give me rest. . . .
Sad I be,
Sad I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me.*

IN THE SHADOWS

*As we went up the narrow stair,
My candle slim and I,
From the crouching shadows came
A little tired sigh.*

*And there was nothing on the stair
Or in my garret room
But cobwebs on the rafters
And corners filled with gloom.*

*And still and silent was the house
And dark and still the air. . . .
But where the shadows wavered
In the candle-flare,
Something small, unearthly, sighed
Out of some strange despair.*

FIGURES IN A NIGHTMARE

*"Is this the way to the Town?" I said
To a man I met on the way.
The wind in the gnarled thorns was chill;
The sky was pale as a wild-goose quill;
And over the brow of the stony hill
I knew that the sea rolled grey.*

*"Does the City lie yonder beside the sea?"
I asked of that man in my dream;
"The City squared upon every side,
With the jasper walls where the bright ones bide,
And scarlet trumpets salute the tide,
And the golden towers gleam?"*

*"There is no City beside the sea!"
Wildly he laughed and shrill;
"That City lies not around any bend
Of any road that your feet might wend.
Why, you can't go farther—you've come to the end
When you cross the brow of the hill!"*

*"But within that City a loved one waits!"
I wept; and wilder cried he,
"I, too, have searched for that jasper wall;
The rams of scarlet, they seemed to call. . . .
But there's nobody, nothing there—nothing at all!
There's nothing down there but THE SEA!"*

THE WITCH WALKS IN HER GARDEN

*"I have spells to cast tomorrow," says the witch,
Walking in her garden in the twilight gloom;
"There's to bog the Squire's sorrel,
Brew for Meg a lover's quarrel
'Twixt her Ned and Gipsy Kate,
Curse two stiles and bailie's gate,
And I'll mend my riding-broom," says the witch.*

*"I must track my foe tomorrow," says the witch,
Bowling to the moon arise above the Druid stones;
"Where he wanders I will follow.
Loam that bears his footprint hollow
I will lift with rune-carved shell,
Toss it down a secret well:
He'll mock no more my old bones!" says the witch.*

*"I will change my skin tomorrow," says the witch,
Peering in her pocket-glass, a frown at what she sees;
"There's a milkmaid young and fair
Whom I'll catch in subtle snare,
Hurl her silly soul to space,
Don her form and wild-rose face,—
Then the lordly lads I'll please!" says the witch.*

*"Oh, I'll break their hearts tomorrow," says the witch,
Whistling up her demon-cat and tying on its bells;
"While a twelve-month circles by
I'll be young and jimp and spry!
Till One comes to claim his own
Sweet revenge I will have known,—
Then let me burn in all his hells!" says the witch.*

THE SEAL-WOMAN'S DAUGHTER

*I am half of the land
And half of the water,
For my dam was a seal
And I am her daughter.*

*I am sib to the land
And kin to the sea,
For my dam was a seal
But a king sired me.*

*My father has built me
A tapestry'd bower
Where twelve duke's daughters
Serve hour by hour.*

*Heroes and princes
Come wooing me,
But there is not one
Who smells of the sea!*

*My old nurse tells me
That I must beware
When I walk on the shore
With my unbound hair.*

*For out of the cold sea
A lover may rise,
Dark, sleek and furry,
With brown seal-eyes.*

*So I walk on the sands
When the grey winds blow,
Afraid of the waves
And what's below.*

*I sit with my maidens
And weave at the loom,
And my flesh rebels
At the fire-warm room.*

*For I'm not all beast
And I'm not quite human
Who have eyes of a seal
In the face of a woman.*

*And where can I rest,
A brown seal's daughter,
Who hates the land
And fears the water?*

THEY RUN AGAIN

*Beyond the black and naked wood
In frosty gold has set the sun,
And dusk glides forth in cobweb hood. . . .
Sister, tonight the werewolves run!*

*With white teeth gleaming and eyes aflame
The werewolves gather within the howe.*
Country churl and village dame,
They have forgotten the wheel and plough,*

*They have forgotten the speech of men;
Their throats are dry with a dreadful thirst;
And woe to the traveler in the glen
Who meets tonight with that band accurst!*

*Now from the hollows creeps the dark;
The moon like a yellow owl takes flight;
Good people on their house-doors mark
A cross, and hug their hearths in fright.*

*Sister, listen! . . . The King-Wolf howls!
The pack is running! . . . Drink down the brew,
Don the unearthly, shaggy cowl—
We must be running, too!*

* A hollow.

THE PATH THROUGH THE MARSH

*There is a path through a marsh
That I must take to go home. . . .
Mallows and thick black loam,
Alder and bog-grass harsh,*

*And the marsh-pools glinting with lights
Of the sunset that stains the sky:
That is all to the eye,
Yet something is there that affrights.*

*Something which I never see
Though I feel its eyes on my back
As I cross on that narrow track,—
Something that watches me.*

*It is never bittern, who thumps
At his hidden churn in the reeds.
It is never heron, who feeds
In the shallows beside old stumps,*

*Or spotted bull-frog, who eyes
Me passing his tiny lake
Where the great green bubbles break
And the veils of the bog-mist rise.*

*But deeper than long-drowned log
Something that never sleeps
Lies crouched in those oozy deeps,
Something as old as the bog. . . .*

*They say that there was a time
When Indians called this sod
"The place of the evil god,"
And prayed to the quivering slime.*

*They say that a Face would appear
In the mists that the night-winds brew,
And would ask for Its ancient due:
One human heart a year.*

*All that is a long-closed book. . . .
But still, as I pass on that track,
I feel something's eyes on my back
And I never dare turn to look,*

*For fear that the mists should spread
And curdle to mouth and eyes
Malefic and old and wise,
Demanding Its terrible bread!*

OLD WIVES' TALE

*She went to the moor in the honey-coloured twilight
to pick wild rushes under a rising moon.
But she had forgotten that the elfin-rings
were green on the Ancient Mound
and that goat-hooved things
piped by the marshy pool.*

*When we told her what night it was
and what herd-girls had seen
up on that moor of old, at the moon's rising,
she said, still, one must pull certain herbs
in the moon's hour,
when roots fill with sleep-inducing power
from that white fiery orb.
She said there was nothing to fear.
She would walk undaunted
by any sound she might hear,
for the clever ones tell that now the moor is unhaunted
and no enchantment lingers
on upland or fell,
even on Walburga's Eve. She said
that silen and troll have fled
and night is shriven of all unnatural dangers.*

*So we let her go,
small and dark against the afterglow,
away from our warning talk,
and some of us felt like fools
as we turned our faces
toward the farms and the paths we know
and the unwitched places.*

*In the dawn a herd with her flock
found a basket tumbled
on the slope of the Ancient Mound,
and a rabbiting boy stumbled home
and told in a voice that was hoarse with fear,
how he'd seen a torn shoe lying
in a patch of gorse,
and beside the marsh
the prints of enormous hooves
in the swart, wet loam.*

A VASE FROM ARABY

*Shaped like a tear-drop, pale as haze
Down where the mirage-cities stand,
Here is a blue enamel vase
Brought overseas from the fabled land.*

*Stoppered with turquoise, scribed around
With golden symbols that curve and flow
Like a guardian serpent, the flask is bound
In some secret spell of the long ago.*

*If curious fingers should break the seal
What would be found in its narrow hold:
Poisons to murder or herbs to heal?
Attar of roses or dust of gold?*

*Beware! . . . In a cloud as black as shame
Amazed eyes might see a Form appear,
With furious wings and hair of flame. . . .
The Djinni for ages imprisoned here!*

THE FUR COAT

*I had a queer thing happen once,
 (The girl in beaver said)
I had this coat on—it was new—
 When I felt a sudden dread,*

*A wild despair, there on the street,
 And pangs shot through my wrist
Like burning pincers. . . . I smelled blood. . . .
 My mouth was dry with thirst.*

*And then I screamed . . . but no one stopped
 To turn a startled face;
And yet I seemed to scream and scream
 Alone in some dark place!*

*But the worst part of this strange affair,
 Just as it passed (she said),
Was that I felt I was this fur
 And I was dying . . . dead.*

HOUSE ACCURST

*“A curse upon this house!” cried he,
Slamming the door behind,
Turning to shake a furious fist
At windows closed and blind.*

*“A curse upon it night and day,
From north unto the south,
And east and west and in and out
I curse it with my mouth!*

*“Down with this house of treachery,
And down with all within!”
While those who listened gave no sign
Or answer to his din.*

*But as the lengthening shadows fell
Of dark hills all around,
From that day forward fell the curse
On all that house and ground.*

*For panes grew cloudy with greenish film.
That once had been clear as air;
Doors stuck fast and a mirror cracked,
And the newell fell from the stair.*

*Fungi gleamed from the dairy's flags
And walls grew dark with damp;
The chimney fouled and would not draw
And the flame burned low in the lamp.*

*Then up from the cellars swarmed the rats
In frightened and frantic gangs!
They slew the cat on the kitchen floor
And the dog howled under their fangs.*

*Tails and whiskers and blood-shot eyes,
They hurried away in the dark.—
That was the night that the well went dry
And the lamp would not show a spark.*

*Quietly, steadily sank the house. . . .
Of those who huddled here
One went mad, but nobody fled,
Bound in a spell of fear.*

*Then came the night when the earth beneath
Cracked with a stealthy sound,
And a huge mouth opened . . . and all that house
Vanished into the ground!*

THE VISION

*I saw a city on a hill
Where city there was none.
It rose with crescent-crested domes
Between me and the sun.*

*The bare, familiar hillside bore
A swaying camel-train:
The scent of sandalwood and spice
Blew in my face like rain.*

*I saw the cloaked and fierce men
Ride through the dazzling light;
One turned and waved a hand to me,
Then vanished out of sight.*

SEA-SHELL

*Stranded upon the sand
Here is a twisted shell:
Lift it within your hand,
Press it against your ear. . . .
Listen! . . . and you shall hear
Echo of deep-sea bell
Ringing in belfry beneath the brine,
Where mermaidens scaled with tourmaline
Toll a dolorous knell.
It's the voice of a city beneath the sea!
Gold-eyed fishes stare endlessly
At turrets and ramparts of porphyry
Drowned in a gold-green well.*

*Who built that city forlorn?
What was its perilous fame
That tymbal and gong and horn
Blared from the torch-lit wall?
When did its doom befall?
What was the reason it came
Crashing down over palace and keep—
A sea that rose like a mountain steep
Quenching the living flame?
Hark! . . . do the sea-shell's echoes tell
The name of that city before she fell?
Ah, no! I can hear its cry, its bell,
But never its fabulous name!*

WILLOW-WOMEN

*Why are you weeping, shepherd-boy,
Lying in the sedge,
Among the roots of willows
By the water's edge?*

*I weep for willow-women,
That they come no more
From the pool at twilight,
Calling 'round my door.*

*My love she was a willow,
A woman from the pool:
For the willows turned to women
When the dusk was cool.*

*The farmer in the lowland,
No willow-love had he.
He feared the faëry women,
He cursed them tree by tree.*

*The farmer in the lowland,
He trampled down the sedge;
He cut the haunted willows down
By the water's edge.*

*Cut down my true-love's willow!
O dead and gone is she
Who came to me at twilight
And gave her love to me!*

*Thus cried that lonely shepherd
Beside the water's edge,
Weeping for willow-women,
The thin green willow-women,
The lost loved willow-women
Who called from the sedge.*

THE GIRL IN THE GLASS

*I found a curious looking-glass
Up in a dusty attic room,
Quivering with a greenish glaze,
Half hidden in the gloom.*

*Deep in those cobwebbed, misty depths
(Veiled like a door to the Otherland)
My image, queerly different, peeped,
Smiled and waved a shadowy hand.*

*“Who are you in the mirror? Who?”
Who was that strange, blurred double there,
Worlds away from the self I knew,
With elfin face and luminous hair?*

*Eyes I know are a cloudless blue
Gazed into mirrored eyes of green,
Moony, unhumanly wise and faë. . . .
“Who is the girl that has lived unseen*

*But sister-near in this lonely place?”
Green eyes mocked into eyes of blue. . . .
Close to my lips, in the glimmering glass
Those twin-lips mimicked “Who?”*

HEARD ON THE ROOF AT MIDNIGHT

*As I sat by my fire one night
Witches I heard on the roof alight.
I heard their broomsticks whinny and neigh,
And then I heard one beldame say:*

*"Well met in darkness, Tess, my lass!
Have you seen our coven comrades pass?"*

*"Aye, Lib! The Kelpie from her tarn,
And half the cats from miller's barn
Tore through the air with fiery eyes,
Each one grown to twice his size!
The hen-wife passed in a weasel's habit—
Oh, the coven gathers for the Sabbat!"*

*Then my blood ran cold, and hot again,
As I heard the witches (heard them plain),
Cry, "You who doze by the dullard hearth,
Open your soul to the ancient mirth!
Chain no longer your secret self,
Take down the besom from its shelf!
The owl's cried twice, the night wind moans,
The moon grins over the Sarsen Stones.
Fling wide the casement, mount and ride—
Walpurgis Night is all outside!"*

*Then I barred the window, I said a prayer;
(To listen longer I didn't dare!)
I clasped the Book and I closed my eyes. . . .
I heard them rush through the midnight skies.
So I looked out the window: all was bare,
Roof and ridgepole and milky air,
And only two bats, who vanished soon,
Were winging their way across the moon.*

TERROR BY NIGHT

*Deep in the gold forests of that dream,
Beyond the ivory gates,
The snow-white Panther waits.*

*The plush side twitches and the jade eyes gleam,
Biding their evil time
In that outlandish clime.*

*And there it lurks, dream after dream, for me. . . .
A night at last will come
When I, defenseless, numb,*

*Facing once more that curious wood, will see
The topaz blossoms shake
And the bright thicket break,*

*Loosing at last, like arrow from a bow,
The terrible, sure pounce
Of that unearthly Ounce. . . .*

*I may awaken to the world I know,
Or rigid in my bed
The dawn may find me dead.*

*Therefore by night I call on every Name
Holy and puissant; tell beads
Of all remembered creeds,*

*Hoping to hold by spell and candle-flame
My soul from those too-deep
And perilous vales of sleep.*

*But farther and farther in that alien land
My unjessed spirit roves
Toward those unfriendly groves.*

*And hidden, alert, where the dream-jungles stand,
With tail lashing to and fro
Waits that implacable foe.*

LEGEND

*They always knew their doom would come
From the white-lipped sea below:
Their city was built high on cliffs
For it was told their doom would come
In legions from the angry sea.*

*So they built galleys, tier on tier
Of benches for the blond-haired slaves.
Their gull-descended captains spied
A stranger-ship almost before
It left its home-port! There were gongs
Hung in the hills where watchers gazed
Forever seaward for the doom.*

*At last the sibyl in her cave
Cried out: Woe, woe! And guts of gulls
Portended dark disaster, signs
That fail not. And the young men bragged
And mended armour in the fire-bright rooms.*

*The king asked merchants from afar:
What alien ships saw you at sea,
Ringed furiously about with shields?
What gossip have you heard of war?*

*One day a ship with ragged sails
Lingered for water at the marble wharf,
And from its stinking hold went forth
A secret cargo on the heedless shore:*

*Rats entered through the brazen gates!
Through every crack and gape and door,
Slipping between the people's feet
In a black-brown unlovely spate.*

*And that city sickened 'til it died.
Those few who still lived stumbled up
And wandered in the hungry hills
And died; and all the dogs went mad
And the gulls picked out their shell-cold eyes.
The city was a hollow shell.*

*And all along the harbored seas
Men told of how that city fell.*

THE HEADS ON EASTER ISLAND

*We know that human hands carved these lean faces
And set them on the dark volcanic hill,
Not fiends or Titans!—only brown Earth-races,
Mysterious, unknown, but mortal still.
Whoever made these gods, they gave them homage,
Brought yams and sweet green cane at dusk or dawn,
Danced to the shaking drums in sea-birds' plumage
And cried their names, and loved them, and are gone.*

*Yet to what men have worshipped always clings
A sense of life unearthly,—and there lies
A spell of power and of timeless things
In these sardonic lips and hooded eyes;
And awe takes hold of every traveler there
Who feels these stones are sleeping, but aware.*

HAUNTED HOUR

*The sky is coloured like a peacock's breast;
There lingers yet one thin, chill line of gold
Down where the woods their somber branches hold
In silhouette against the fading west.
Dark leaves, dark earth, slow-breathing and at rest,
Whence frail scents rise of dew-wet grass and mold.
A single star gleams diamond-clear and cold
Like one sharp note from angel viol wrest.*

*This is the haunted hour—such woods surround
Grey Merlin in his oak, adrowse with dwale;
In such a gloaming once the lorn knight found
The faëry woman in the river-vale;
And underneath this star long, long ago
The Dark Tower heard a lonely slug-horn blow!*

GOAT-SONG

*Young wives and blossoming maidens
Would hear the satyr-men
Piping in laurel thickets
In the mountain glen.*

*Gathering mint and gentians
Beside the shadowed brook
Girls heard the goat-cry . . . listened,
But dared not turn and look*

*At peering, uncouth faces
Grinning in grotesque mirth:
The shagged and cloven races
Old as the wrinkled Earth!*

*Lutie in upland pastures
Had heard the goat-song, heard
Pipes in a wild-rose cover
Sob like a hidden bird.*

*Lutie had paused and harkened
Amid her maddened sheep
To music that mocked and beckoned,
Feeling her young blood leap*

*Wild with the antique terror!
Then with her flock had fled,
Glimpsing through leaf and briar
The horned, half-human head.*

*Lying of nights by Peter,
Lutie would dream of eyes
Green as the green fox-fire,
And of brown, furry thighs.*

*Where curls like black grapes clustered
She'd see the curved horns prick;
Feel swart lips press and blister,
And waken half sick,*

*Longing for monstrous wooings
Beneath the laurel shade;
Then pray, and fall to weeping,
And greet the dawn afraid.*

*Winter is time left fallow
When green blood does not burn:
Crouched in beech-tree hollows
Sleep the people of the fern.*

*Winter is time turned craven
When red blood does not flame
Bold in the veins of humans:
Or not the same.*

*Under their snow-thatched rafters
Lutie spun and wove,
Content with stolid Peter
And Peter's homespun love,*

*Giving a curious welcome
To snow-drifts thickly piled
Against their hillward windows,
Walling out the Wild.*

*Only the north wind wandered
On uplands grown remote;
Only the hearth-fire whispered
Its low untroubled note.*

*Yet under the fire's purring
Or in sleep too deep for dream,
She would sense a cold thought stirring
Like a fish in placid stream:*

*That the wise birds wing back ever,
Green lives and red awake;
Earth's children stretch and quiver
And leap within the brake;*

*And from the thawing ridges
The wild wet breeze would bring
The sound of satyrish stamping
And the perilous pipes of spring.*

THE NIXIE'S POOL

*Go not to the Nixie's pool!
In those waters dim and cool
Gleams a pale and lovely face
Framed in hair like green fern-lace,
Arms of more than mortal grace
Smooth as lily, and as cool.*

*By all that's holy, all that's good,
Shun the hollow in the wood
Where the giant beech-trees grow
And the water-lilies glow,
And the rushes, parting, show
Wet limbs white as birchen-wood.*

*Knight-at-arms with blazoned shield,
Plough-boy homing from the field,
Never heed what you may hear:
Song that rises wild and clear
From the little hidden mere,
Like bird in no man's field.*

*If you harken, if you follow
To her water-haunted hollow,
Bid farewell to tilting-ground,
Plodding ox or faithful hound!—
Deep in Faërie you'll be bound
With the Nixie of the hollow.*

THE STRANGER

(To Lord Dunsany)

*The stranger, the proud-headed man
Who sat with us by the inn's fire,
Spoke all that day of gusty rain
Of the land of his desire.*

*It is a land of apple-trees (he said)
On islands watered by many a spring,
The boughs bearing both bloom and fruit
Where, leaf-hidden, white birds sing.*

*White towers they have there, scarlet-roofed,
Circled with rivers, windowed with amethyst,
Where dwell the beautiful, smiling folk
Who doeth as they list,*

*And little of that is evil. Love and death
Trouble also that land with their old story,
But set in loftier halls and under sunnier skies
And rainbowed with glory.*

*And there are quests for alien grails, and angels walk
At sunset on the desolate shrunken sands.
There is no sorrow less than the fall of kings,
And the winged sphinx is the terror of the land.*

*Up the jagged mountains, over the cold plateaus,
Curious bugles ring from thunderous cliffs
Where, furred with otter and belted with peridots,
Kings and young princes hunt the hippogriffs.*

*And those are the perilous mountains of the trolls
Who hoard the rubies that the witches fear.
That is the country whence I came (he said),
It is not here . . . not here.*

ENCOUNTER IN BROCELIANDE

*I knew that shape the instant seen
Approaching through the fabled wood;
I saw the wreath of helleborine
Beneath the shadow of her hood.*

*Stepping between two oak-tree boles
On light feet shod in miniver,
No dry leaf stirred beneath her soles,
The bracken did not bend for her.*

*The cup of dwale within her hand
I saw sly Vivien at last,
Moving remotely through the land
In some queer mirage of the past!*

*So did she pass behind the trees,
Smiling sidewise beneath her cowl. . . .
The white mist billowed to my knees,
The dusk swooped downward like an owl,*

*And hid was that malevolent face,
And lost the secret of her sin:
Of where in that enchanted place
Her sorceries had bound Merlin!*

THE WINDOW ON THE STAIR

*As I went up the small steep stair
The sun was dipping low,
And the little window's coloured panes
Turned into jewels aglow.
Purple, golden and ruby-red,
Emerald as Samarkand,
They twinkled against the last long rays
Like the doors to Faëryland.*

*The house was hushed as the snow outside,
And time stood still for a space,
Await for something to come to pass
In that light, in that glamour'd place. . . .
Something—I knew not what or how—
Would awake in that rainbow light. . . .
I stood looking up from the midmost step
And my throat felt small and tight.*

*Then a clock chimed, off in a distant room;
The sun slipped under the rim;
Suddenly all of the little panes
Were lusterless, cold and dim.
Disenchanted, they held the dusk,
And I went on up the stair,
Never to know what magical thing
Had almost happened there.*

THE OLD WORLD OF GREEN

*We are so near to you,
(I heard the Wild Folk say)
Only a meadow or two,
A field and a farm away.*

*Up in the pine-sweet air,
Up where the blue haze lies,
More than the fox or hare
Whispers and creeps and cries.*

*We are so near, so near
To the roofs and hearths of man—
Strange that you never hear
The clattering hooves of Pan!*

*Only the heron sees
The undines in water-falls;
Only the wild kildees
Answer the satyrs' calls.*

*But there are eyes in the sedge,
There are hands in the thorn—
Waiting just over the edge
Are we who are wilderness-born.*

*Maiden wandering late
Where the hills' long shadows lean,
Come where the Wild Things wait
In the old world of green!*

CURIOUS STORY

*"Yes . . . yes . . . I saw the sirens once,"
The ancient seaman said,
Staring beyond the driftwood blaze
Into a past of nights and days
Incredible, and dead.*

*"We saw them sitting on their rock
In that blue alien sea.
The tales men told of them are true,
For none save I of all our crew
Won home alive and free.*

*"Bird-winged, bird-breasted, with calm eyes
That knew not right or wrong,
They looked at us,—I saw their smile,
I saw their girl-lips part the while
They sang their deadly song.*

*"It must have been a marvelous song!
It drew men o'er the side
Of our stout ship like a lodestone even,
Plunging like souls in hope of Heaven!
They listened, and they died."*

*"And what song did the sirens sing?"
He turned his trembling head,
Watching me closely as I spoke:
"I am alive of all that folk,
For I am deaf," he said.*

*He gazed beyond the cottage door
To where the harbour slept,
Each small ship folded like a bird:
“Deaf! Deaf! Alas, I never heard
That song!” he said, and wept.*

THE STEPS IN THE FIELD

*In a field that no one weeds
A flight of stone steps upward leads
From the grass and Queen-Anne's-Lace:
It is a still and lonely place.*

*There is no house there any more;
The steps go mounting to no door.
They lead the way but to the sky
Where the hawks are hovering high.*

*If trespassers climbed that stair
What would happen to them there?
Would they merely stand, and see
Where the portals used to be?*

*Maybe when they reached the top
They would find they could not stop,—
Go on climbing, foot and shoe,
Secret stairways in the blue!*

*They might vanish, boot or dress,
Into sunny emptiness,
Leaving field and Queen-Anne's-Lace
For some very different place. . . .*

*Though we know it's just a game
Children play there, just the same
Do not venture . . . what if you
Climbed those steps and found it true?*

MIDSUMMER NIGHT

*Now from the spray of the branching briar
The cobweb trembles, adroop with dew;
The white moth seeks the foxglove's spire;
The witch-owl cries "Tu-whoo, tu-whoo,"
And from the gloom
Of her pine-tree room
Her silent wings dip low.*

*Now from the banks of the reedy pool
The fireflies dance in a golden reel.
Where the toadstool-tapers burn green and cool
The spider spins at her busy wheel;
And through the ferns
Where the cricket churns
The thin young foxes go.*

*The brown bee sleeps in the thistle's house
But the bull-frog blows on his deep bassoon.
On some secret journey goes flittermouse;
The faraway hills await the moon.
The shadows brim
The valley's rim
And deeper the twilight falls.*

*And over the hills the round moon rolls!
She reaches a white and summoning hand
And taps on the silver beech-tree boles,
And strange doors open at that command:
The bark swings free,
And from tree to tree
Dryad to dryad calls.*

OLD DAPHNE

*Here water-music makes a low lament
around my chilly roots,
and in my coral-gemmed, dark-shining tent
wind-whisperings,
bird-flutes,
tell me of Spring again. No other sound:
and yet I seem to hear
the god's feet throbbing on the ground
as in that lost young year.*

*And a sigh that green blood hardly understands
makes my branches quiver,
feeling my flowers, like love,
slip from my hands
to the hurrying river.*

MAD WOMAN'S SONG

*I know that the black dog crouches beyond the door,
I can hear him whimper over the whistle of wind!
The willows down by the brook are wringing their
hands
And the clock is telling time that is frayed and thinned.*

*I say to myself: If I let the black dog in
He will master the house, but his whining will drive
me mad.
I know that he wants me to follow him down to the
brook—
I can hear him snuff at the sill and slouch and pad.*

*The willows and he have a pact—I've heard them talk
Together, on midnights without a moon or star,
When they thought I was sleeping under the dripping
eaves.
I know how they plot! I've caught all their words in a
jar*

*And hid it away on a shelf! Now I'm going to rock
And I'm not going to open my door to the willowy
dark
And that damned black hound—let him howl all night!
I will stay indoors and talk to my grouchy clock.*

*But the moon comes up with a rush through the
window-pane
And looks at me as I rock, with a huge dog-eye. . . .
O, I'll have to follow that moon and that crazy hound
Down, down to the brook and throw myself in and
die!*

GRIFFON'S GOLD

*Men told him:
Do not hunt the griffon guarding his secret gold!
There is no griffon—in all sooth,
we tell you there is naught of truth
in that hoar myth,—
'tis but an old wives' tale once told.*

*Thus did they speak,
the wise ones and the old.*

*So he turned his back
on those glittering peaks
and gave over
dreams of a prize that no man can discover.
And though he feels a lack
of something jeopardous and bright
to salt his days,
he never now
climbs higher than his plough
climbs over a low hill's brow from dawn to night.*

*But up in the fabulous mountains,
past the pines and the pebbled fountains,
a mighty shape lies crouched in the blaze of sun.
Over the tawny fur
the great wings fold,
where, on the last red scar,
at the door of his rocky dun,
the griffon keeps his ancient ward
over that immemorial hoard
of gold.*

BLACK PEACOCK

*When the peaks of Kaf receive the dawn
And the doe seeks water with her fawn,
Down in the gardens of the Khan
wakes the one black peacock.*

*An alien in the feathered herd
Of peacocks indigo and verde,
He is the sole obsidian bird,
the proud black peacock.*

*In what strange jungle did he nest?
Beneath what peri's burning breast?—
This darkling prince shunned by the rest,
the lone black peacock?*

*Beside the marble-prisoned lakes
He cries his grief. His screaming wakes
The close, night-drenched acacia-brakes,
the sad black peacock.*

*And humbler birds, grown silent there,
Thrill to the anger and despair
Of one too splendid and too rare:
the proud lone sad black peacock.*

THE CENTAURS

*Once in my youth I saw the centaurs drinking
up where the pines are fur on the mountain's flank.
They stood to their girths in the hazel-coloured water;
monstrous, they drank.*

*Under their glossy sides the water rippled
in widening rings of amber and gold.
Their eyes
were golden with rings of jet; and tawny-amber
I saw the close-curved heads from their man-necks rise.*

*Under the pines and the thin, sun-dappled birches
they cupped the water to lips that were dark and thick.
Beneath my hesitant foot a dry branch crackled. . . .
brown ears aprick,
startled, they whinnied, their gold eyes rolling in fury,—
the water churned topaz and crystal between their
knees!*

*Crashing, they gained the bank and the ferny thickets,
they vanished among the trees.*

*Then I said: When I am tall, when I am older,
I shall come again upon centaurs!
One I shall chase
and catch and bind for my own, whip, saddle and
halter,
to go at my pace!*

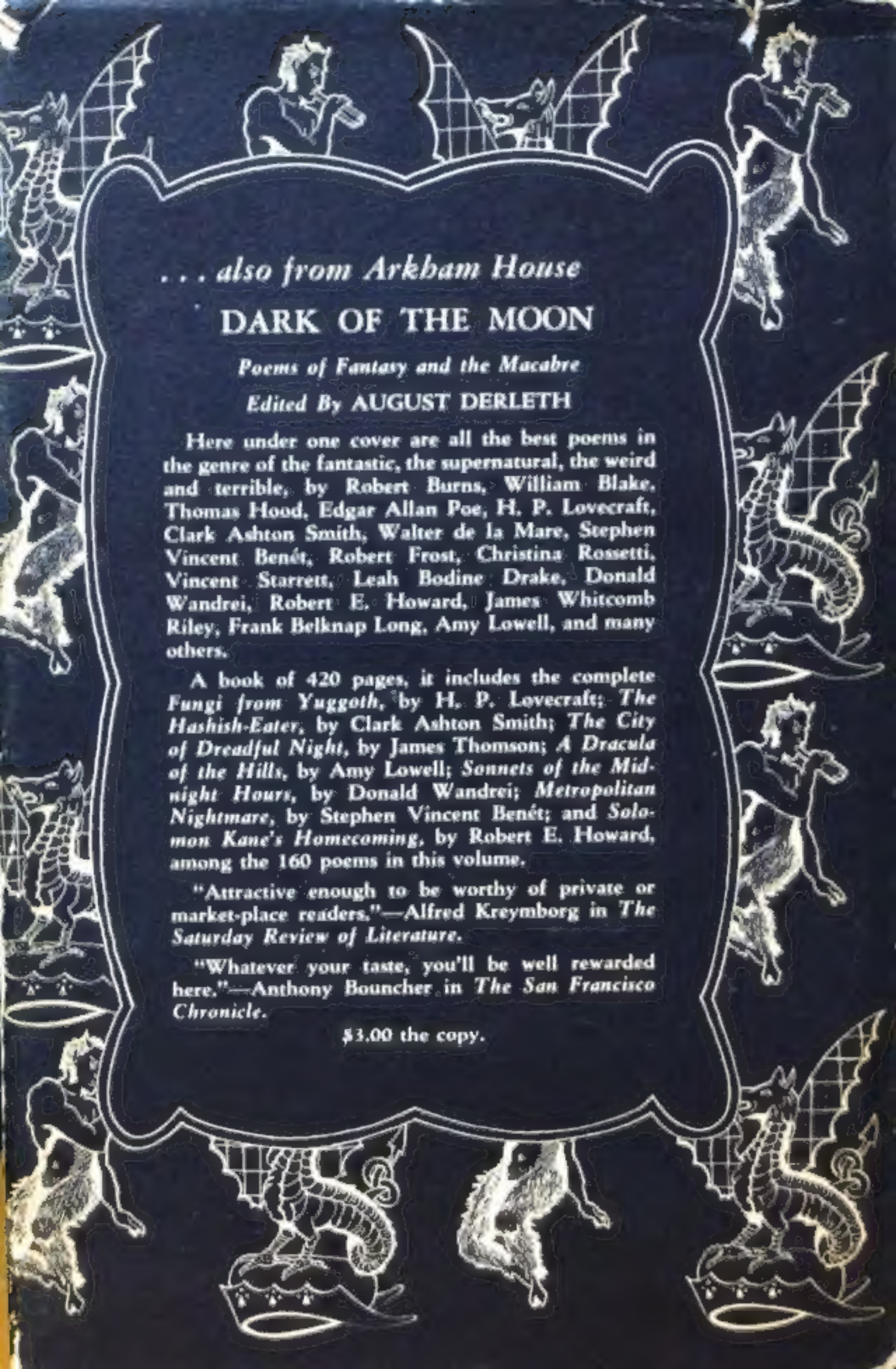
*But never again have I seen the proud, shy creatures,
No mark of a hoof in the turf nor a crested head.
None of those whom I ask have heard that thunderous
passing:
the woods and the heights are bare,
the centaurs have fled.*

About LEAH BODINE DRAKE

Leah Bodine Drake was born in Chanute, Kansas, the daughter of an oilman, but has lived all over the South and Southwest, and at present makes her home in Evansville, Indiana. Her choice of the macabre in poetry comes naturally, for her earliest memories include the tremendous silences of the Navajo country, the woods and swamps of the deep South, and tales of "ha'nts" told by Aunt Coopie, a Negro member of the household.

She attended Hamilton College for Women in Lexington, Kentucky, and is currently movie, dramatic and music critic of the *Evansville Courier*. Her poems have appeared in many magazines, among them *The Southern Literary Messenger*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Weird Tales*, *Nature*, *The Arkham Sampler*, *Country Bard*, *Wings*, *Talaria*, *The Poetry Chapbook*, *Silver Star*, and others. Her *Ballad of the Jabberwock* won the Stephen Vincent Benét Ballad Contest in 1946 and appeared for the first time in print in the anthology, *Dark of the Moon*.

Miss Drake's ancestral background is English, Irish, Welsh, and French, and the family-tree includes Sir Francis Drake, Davy Crockett, and Jean Bodin—all names with which the student of history will be familiar. Her main interests, apart from poetry, include collecting books illustrated by Dulac and Rackham, walking in the woods, Dixieland jazz, the works of C. S. Lewis, and, as vice-president of the local humane society, rescuing dogs, cats and horses from what E. E. Cummings calls 'manunkind.'



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